War-Time Coalescence

By: Alex Rier (Courtesy of The University of Iowa Libraries)

World War II formed many alliances between nations. Nations also came together on the home front providing for the war. Similarly, in a letter from Joseph Fiialkowski to Dorothea Calhoun in 1942, coalescence can be seen even more detailed than countries forming alliances. Mr. Fiialkowski was a resident near Burlington, Iowa and had an account with Mr. Calhoun. No other information about Mr. Fiialkowski can be found anywhere except his birth and death dates. Along with the historical context, the rhetoric utilized by Mr. Fiialkowski provides a purpose for the letter and inferable characteristics about Mr. Fiialkowski and how people treated each other during World War II.

Image: Original Letter - written by Joseph Fiialkowski
First, Mr. Fiialkowski attempts to establish comfort with Mrs. Calhoun. He does this by providing a brief background of himself. He states that he “used to live near Burlington,” which must’ve been a known place for Mrs. Calhoun, and claims he “had an account with Mr. Calhoun.” Mr. Fiialkowski then explains his purpose with, “we want to pay the balance now, and have been trying to get in touch of his [Mr. Calhoun] office and have written there and have got no answer.” This allows Mrs. Calhoun to understand the purpose and reasoning why she is receiving a letter, and the commonplace device was used so Mrs. Calhoun can read through the letter without a fear of being stalked.

From the tone of the letter, Mr. Fiialkowski is concerned about this money balance. He has sent a letter previously to Mr. Calhoun and has yet to receive a reply, “nor out letter did not return.” Therefore, after the first attempt, Mr. Fiialkowski placed the blame onto the Calhouns by stating, “we hesitate to send the money until we hear from you or Mr. Calhoun.” This blame acts as a persuasion tool to get action out of the Calhouns so Mr. Fiialkowski can balance dues accordingly. Not only does blame attempt to create action, the desire that Mr. Fiialkowski implements into the letter also provokes action. The amount of money may seem small, a measly nine dollars; however, in 1942 that amount of money would have totaled
Money is a common desire in our nation, and, by example, Mr. Fiialkowski uses this tactic to generate the desire and lust out of the Calhouns.

Mr. Fiialkowski, a man with next to no information on, can be interpreted as a respectful and responsible person by the rhetoric he used in the letter. He has concerns about the money he owes the Calhouns and continues to send letters after the first letter failed to receive a reply. Mr. Fiialkowski knew that money was precious at the time, and he took responsibility on making sure that the money he owed went to the intended person.

The letter from Mr. Fiialkowski to Mrs. Calhoun was sent in 1942. There was a letter that Mr. Fiialkowski sent earlier to Mr. Calhoun, however, received no response nor did the letter get sent back. Perhaps a little history on Mr. Calhoun can explain the “no response.” Mr. Calhoun earned a law degree at the University of Iowa in 1929. He was a political person, and moved to Burlington after running an unsuccessful campaign for Congress. In Burlington, he opened up a new law firm, and must have met Mr. Fiialkowski as well. Mr. Fiialkowski could have been associated with the law firm, and Mr. Calhoun did abstract work for him “some ages ago.” This could account for the purpose of the letter and the background behind the money.

At this time World War II was occurring, and Mr. Calhoun happened to be a part of the National Guard. He was stationed in the Middle East, a part of the Judge Advocate General’s Office, and he was ranked as a lieutenant colonel until 1946 when he was released. With this knowledge, one can assume that Mr. Calhoun was actively engaged with the war happening overseas and not present at his home in Iowa. The letters that were sent to him during that time period were either not opened until after the war or
discarded. This most likely explain the reason Mr. Fiialkowski was having troubles contacting Mr. Calhoun.

From the context and tone of Mr. Fiialkowski, it is prevalent that he is worried about this indebted amount of money. The amount in the letter may not seem like an amount to lose your day over; however, as mentioned above, nine dollars in 1942 is worth over one-hundred and thirty-five dollars in today’s market. The US just signed the Lend Lease Act in 1941, which sent over $50 billion to aid ally countries in Europe for the war.

![Image: Lend-Lease Act of 1941](image)

This amount of money Mr. Fiialkowski owes Mr. Calhoun could easily pay off a debt, and would certainly not want to be seen as an attempt of stealing by Mr. Fiialkowski from Mr. Calhoun’s standpoint. These concerns are expressed more than once in the letter and continue in the “p.s.” section of the letter as well. The concerns address care involved with Mr. Fiialkowski and the Calhouns. Mr. Fiialkowski shifts the blame to the Calhouns and uses desire in an attempt to get action out of them. The rhetoric and historical context together point further towards the conclusion
about Mr. Fiialkowski’s character. Mr. Fiialkowski is responsible with paying his money, and making sure that the $9 gets to the correct owner. He attains respect with his repetition of concerns and sending of a second letter in order to get action out of the Calhouns. Mr. Fiialkowski had an overall good intention. Similarly to our nation coming together to fight and prepare for the war, the people everywhere came together because they cared about each other. It was an era of coalescence.

Other images:

Regions occupied by US forces in the Middle East during WWII
The Suez Canal

References List:


